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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0955
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 002885

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, INR/EAP
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SUBJECT: ACEH -- GOI REBUFFS MOVE TO REGISTER FREE ACEH
MOVEMENT AS A PARTY

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (U) This message was coordinated with Consulate Medan.

12. (C) SUMMARY: In a long-anticipated move, the GOI has refused to register the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) as a political party. The decision was based largely on the party's use of the Acehnese flag and GAM name. GAM officials blasted the government's action, but promised to abide by the decision so long as it was legal. The GOI's action may have backfired by rallying GAM leaders--previously critical of their own party--to its defense. END SUMMARY.

NO TO AN OFFICIAL "GAM PARTY"

13. (SBU) During an October 10 meeting with members of the Legal Affairs Committee of the national parliament (DPR), Minister of Law and Human Rights Andi Mattalata announced that his ministry rejected the GAM Party's registration as a local political party. The proposed party violates Pancasila (founding principles of Indonesia), the country's Constitution, Aceh's autonomy law, and could even threaten national unity, according to Mattalata. He added that the decision was final, although no formal review had taken place.

14. (SBU) Coordinating Minister for Politics and Security Widodo A.S. also said banning the party was necessary to prevent separatism. According to Widodo, the party's use of the GAM name and the GAM flag--which the GOI considers a military insignia--were the key problems.

GAM REACTION

15. (SBU) GAM reaction was critical but restrained. GAM Party spokesman Ibrahim Syamsuddin called the government's refusal to register the party illegal and premature; the product of "central government leaders who know nothing about the political process in Aceh." Syamsuddin denied that the proposed party violates the Constitution or other laws and said the GAM flag was not a military symbol. Despite his harsh criticism of the decision, Syamsuddin told reporters

the party would accept the government's decision so long as it was based on the law.

RALLYING AROUND THE FLAG

¶6. (C) As Minister Widodo's comments made clear, the GOI considers the GAM flag irredeemably linked to separatism. GAM members of all stripes--including those who opposed the use of the flag as a party symbol--disagree. Several GAM members told us the flag had nothing to do with the military struggle, but represented instead the ideals of justice, dignity, and good government. One GAM elected official who is not a member of the party placed the flag in the context of Acehese identity. According to him, virtually all former GAM members have given up their dream of independence, but asking them to abandon the symbol of Aceh's proud history is too much for GAM members and supporters.

¶7. (C) Several former GAM members and sympathizers who originally opposed the creation of the GAM Party now defend it. One GAM official said he initially opposed the party because it bypassed elected leaders such as himself and Governor Irwandi Yusuf. He now defends the party because he believes the Ministers' comments strike at all former GAM members, not just party organizers.

¶8. (C) A GAM official from East Aceh who felt the proposed party had hijacked the flag and GAM name to advance the political objectives of the overseas GAM elite has revised his position as well. He told us that he now feels compelled to defend the proposed party in order to defend the Acehese flag.

DECISION BACKFIRES?

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¶9. (C) Members of the GOI's coordination team (FKK) agreed that the ban might have backfired. One FKK official said prior to the announcement that party organizers appeared willing to negotiate quietly about the party name and symbol. That is now impossible because party leaders cannot back down without appearing weak in front of their supporters. In effect, he said, the government has enhanced the party's prominence and given party organizers ammunition to accuse Jakarta of being anti-GAM, something which could play into the hands of more radical movement members. Quiet negotiations, he said, would have been better than the loud, public criticism.

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